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ABSTRACT

This 1991 study investigated how thoroughly the news media reported stories about children's issues, focusing on the two media by which most Americans receive their daily news: television and newspapers. It analyzed a broad sample of news coverage including 12 major newspapers from across the country and newscasts on four leading national television networks. For each source sampled, news products were monitored daily for 3 months. News stories were judged to determine whether they contained a primary focus on children and/or child-related issues. They were further scrutinized to determine whether they fell into any of five topic areas (child abuse and neglect, child care, child health insurance, teen childbearing, and youth crime and violence). Analysis of these stories indicated that youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect received extensive coverage in the news, collectively accounting for more than nine out of every ten stories across all five categories. The other topics were consistently overlooked. Stories on youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect were framed in episodic fashion, emphasizing breaking news and developments. They had dramatically low rates of important contextual information. In the areas of child care and teen childbearing, three out of four stories included some important contextual information. (SM)

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COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

How Thoroughly The News Media Report Five Key Children's Issues

A study commissioned by the Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families,
Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park

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Introduction

Studies have shown that news coverage devoted to a given topic influences the public's perception of its importance. By serving as gatekeepers of messages that the public receives about the condition of children in the United States, the media play a pivotal role in influencing public awareness of child-related concerns. Several studies have examined the extent of media coverage of child-related topics by assessing broad themes represented in national TV and print news[1], as well as in local television news[2]. Those findings revealed that child-related news coverage occurs on a relatively frequent basis, with roughly half of all child-related stories devoted to crime and violence coverage. Very little of the news coverage examined was devoted to policy-related topics.

Because the previous studies were primarily descriptive in nature, they addressed questions such as how often children were the focus of news reports, and in what types of topics. However, much less scrutiny has been devoted to the question of *how thoroughly* the news media report stories about children's issues. That is the focus of this research.

In collaboration with the Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, researchers for this project selected five key topics which data suggest are of critical significance to the well-being of children: child abuse and neglect; child care; child health insurance; teen childbearing; and youth crime and violence. These realms are of interest to both local and national policymakers. Yet if information regarding these topics is to educate the public, stories must do more than report isolated events. Presumably they should provide context, helping the reader to place recent developments into a broader base of knowledge about the underlying issues related to a given story.

In order to assess the quality of the coverage delivered by the news media in these five areas, the Casey Journalism Center commissioned Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research firm studying child-related issues, to summarize the most important information currently available in each realm. Senior researchers at Child Trends prepared one-page briefings on each of the five topics. Each briefing paper includes an initial summary statement, followed by four "bullet" points, each representing a pertinent trend or development in that area. For example, in the topic of child health insurance, the summary statement reads: "The percentage of children with health insurance coverage has remained largely unchanged (between 85-87%) for more than a decade." The first of the detailed "bullet" points reads: "Children in working poor families are less likely to have health insurance than either children in other poor families or children in families that are not poor." Copies of each of the briefing papers prepared for use in this study are included in Appendix A of this report.

These briefing papers were then used as the basis for evaluating whether stories in each topic provided relevant background or contextual information with which to evaluate recent events or developments. The study examines the two primary media by which most Americans receive their daily news: television and newspapers. A broad and large sample of news coverage was analyzed for this research, including 12 major newspapers from across the country, as well as newscasts on four leading national television networks. For each source sampled, the study

[1] Kunkel, 1994; Kunkel, Rollin & Biely, 1999
[2] Dorfman, Woodruff, Chavez & Wallack, 1997; Parker, Miller, Donegan & Gilliam, 2001

monitored news product on a daily basis for three months. Overall, the study examined 1,065 editions of newspapers and 354 television newscasts, which establishes it as the largest empirical analysis of child-related news coverage yet produced by the scientific community.

Methodology

Sample. The news content analyzed for this research was gathered between April 21 and July 20, 2001. During this period, each source monitored by the study was examined on a daily basis. Twelve major circulation newspapers were selected for inclusion based on considerations of broad geographical diversity as well as diversity of ownership. The newspapers included in the study were: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Chicago Tribune, The Denver Post, Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, The Miami Herald, Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), *The New York Times, The Daily Oklahoman, The* (Portland) *Oregonian, The Washington Post*, and the national newspaper *USA Today*. In addition, four national television news sources were included in the study: ABC, CBS and NBC (the only three broadcast networks with daily newscasts), and the leading cable news network, CNN. For each of the broadcast networks, their 30-minute nightly newscast was videotaped and analyzed, while for CNN the 30-minute newscast airing at 10 p.m. EST was examined. The 10 p.m. newscast for CNN was selected because its 30-minute length matched that of the broadcast network newscasts, and would therefore minimize disparities in findings across networks that would be attributable to the much larger news hole available on CNN.

Stories Examined by the Study. This broad sample of news media coverage was evaluated using systematic content analysis procedures. Stories were initially judged to determine whether they contained a primary focus on children and/or child-related issues. Children were defined as those under 18 years of age. In cases where age was not specified but grade level was, we included youth through the high school years, but did not classify stories about college students as representing children. After any story was identified as child-related, it was further scrutinized to determine whether or not it fit within any of the five topic areas that are the focus of the study. Only those stories that fell within the boundaries of one of these five issue areas were analyzed. The topics are:

- **Child abuse and neglect**. Stories in this category focus on maltreatment (either overt acts or failure to take action) on the part of a parent, child caregiver, or provider that poses risk of or results in death, serious physical, emotional, and/or developmental harm. Common examples in this category include stories about child abandonment or child sexual molestation.

- **Child care**. These stories report on individuals, groups, or institutions that provide primary care for youngsters' needs on a regular basis while parents are at work or otherwise preoccupied. The children receiving care must be under 13 years of age and not related to the child-care provider for a story to be coded in this category. For example, stories may focus on the extent to which families rely on child care, the quality of child care (e.g., facilities, personnel, curriculum), or the effects of child care on children's development.

- **Child health insurance**. These stories address issues involving whether, and how well, children are covered by health insurance for basic medical treatment. All types of stories

involving public or private health insurance coverage for children are included, as well as stories about children who are not insured through these or any other type of health plan.

- **Teen childbearing**. Stories in this category are those concerned with teen pregnancy, decisions to have a child, and/or subsequent child rearing by teen parents of either gender, whether married or not. Examples include stories about the day-to-day life of a pregnant teen, a teenage mother who graduates from high school, or the risks faced by children of teen parents.

- **Youth crime and violence**. This area was defined as any story concerned with illegal activity in which victims are directly and intentionally threatened or harmed, with a child involved as either a perpetrator or victim. For example, a story might focus on a young child who commits a murder (e.g., a schoolyard shooting) or who has been the victim of a violent crime.

Each relevant story was classified within only one of the five topic areas examined in the study. In order to be included in the study, a story had to focus prominently on children, and have a primary orientation throughout the story on one of the topic areas. Any story that might arguably fit within multiple areas was classified in the one category judged to be its strongest match, with one exception. Obviously, many stories in the child abuse/neglect area would also qualify as youth violence/crime (i.e., children as victims of violence). In all such cases involving this type of overlap, the story was classified solely as child abuse/neglect, privileging the more specific of the two topic areas.

In order to maintain a focus on news coverage and to limit consideration to substantial stories, editorials and opinion articles were excluded, as were any stories that did not exceed three column inches in length. In addition, because the evaluative criteria that were applied in the study were focused on knowledge in the five topic areas from a distinctly U.S. perspective, stories with a primarily international orientation were also excluded.

Descriptive Measures. Each story that fit within one of the five topic areas and met the additional criteria specified above was analyzed on a number of descriptive measures, including story length; story placement (i.e., section of the newspaper); story position (lead vs. buried, with lead defined as a newspaper story on the front page of any section, or a television story that aired before the first commercial break within a newscast); and story frame (episodic vs. thematic, which differentiates "breaking news" from the less time-sensitive analysis of an issue).

In addition, observations were collected about the types of information contained in each story, including the following variables: use of expert sources; use of parents or children as sources; use of statistical information; providing information of practical use for parents (defined as identifying specific actions or strategies that parents can employ in child-rearing); and providing historical context for the story (defined as supplementary information at least 1 year old).

Finally, stories were examined to determine whether or not they included information about public policy. Stories that addressed public policy issues were also judged on the extent to

which they presented factual information about the current state of policy, identified any successes accomplished by current policy, identified any problems with current policy, or presented any suggestions or proposals for future policy.

Evaluative Measures. As indicated above, expert briefing papers were prepared in each of the five topic areas examined by this research. Each briefing paper included an overall summary statement of critical knowledge within that topic area, followed by four independent "bullet" points. For each of these five elements, coders judged whether or not stories provided information consistent with or closely relevant to these key points of information. Original observations were classified on a five-point scale, with judgments ranging from "presents no relevant information" to "presents all aspects clearly and prominently in the story." Due to the very low frequency with which stories were found to include any information relevant to the topic area knowledge identified by the expert briefing papers, the data from the evaluative measures is reported dichotomously, differentiating those stories that included any such information from those stories that did not.

Coding Judgments and Reliability. The coding judgments for this study were performed by a group of 12 undergraduate student research assistants at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Data evaluating each newspaper or newscast were obtained from a single coder. Thus, it is important to demonstrate that the judgments made by coders demonstrated strong agreement throughout the process of data collection.

Coders were trained for approximately 40 hours under the close supervision of the study's authors before beginning their work. At the conclusion of training, a reliability test was conducted to demonstrate an acceptable level of consistency across coders. Once actual coding of data began, nine additional tests of inter-coder reliability were conducted at roughly one-week intervals throughout the period of data collection. Each test involved the independent review of a randomly selected newspaper or television newscast in its entirety by all coders.

Across all of these tests, coders achieved an overall level of agreement of 82% on their decisions about whether or not to classify a story as child-related within one of the five topic areas examined by the study[3]. At the next level of story identification, coders agreed 94% of the time on the topic area for all stories that they decided to code. Across 23 items included in the descriptive measures, coders agreed more than 90% of the time on 16 of them, and between 86-89% on 5 of the measures. Two variables achieved more modest reliability: stories that identify problems with current policy (72%) and stories that present suggestions/proposals for future policy (77%). Items such as these with reliability in the 70-80% range are generally viewed with some caution due to their slightly reduced, though still acceptable level of reliability. Finally, there were 20 items (5 within each topic area) that made up the evaluative measures for

[3] In content analysis research, simple variables (e.g., the age of TV characters) are expected to be coded at a level of approximately 90% agreement in order to yield legitimate data, whereas more complex variables are generally judged as acceptable by social scientists when they achieve a level of agreement of approximately 80% or above. Disagreements rarely occurred about whether or not to code articles with a clear emphasis on children, yet many articles mentioned children and/or family concerns tangentially and posed a challenge for coders about whether or not to include them as having a "primary focus" on children. The 82% agreement rate on decisions to code articles for this study is consistent with previous research published in leading peer reviewed academic journals, given the complexity of the task.

the study. Coders achieved a 90% or greater level of agreement across all of these items. Thus, with the exception of the 2 descriptive items identified above, the reliability assessments establish strong confidence in the accuracy of the data reported in the study.

Findings

Frequency of Coverage. The starting point for assessing the news media's coverage of these five key children's issues is to examine the relative frequency with which stories addressed any of the topic areas. From an overall perspective, 1,024 stories were identified across the 1,065 newspaper editions analyzed, indicating that an average of roughly one story from among the five areas was found in each edition of the newspapers surveyed. While accurate statistically, this overall perspective masks a number of important trends in the data, including significant differences in the frequency of stories provided within each of the five topic areas, as well as disparities in the number of relevant stories delivered by the varying news sources included in the study (see Table 1).

Focusing first on reports delivered by the print media, we see that more than half of all newspaper stories (53%) identified by the study involved youth crime and violence, while an additional 40% were in the area of child abuse and neglect. Thus, a total of 94%[4] of all print stories included in the study (N=959) addressed child-related crime and violence of one sort or another. The remaining 6% of stories included 3% (N= 35) devoted to the topic of child care, 2% (N=19) involving teen childbearing, and 1% (N=11) addressing child health insurance. The data make clear that these latter three issue areas receive only scant attention from the print news media, as a total of only 65 stories were presented over a three-month period across all 12 of the newspapers surveyed. That translates into roughly 5.5 stories per news source over the three-month sampling period, or an average of less than 2 stories per month, devoted to coverage of child care, teen childbearing, or child health insurance.

Examining the frequency of coverage provided by each of the individual newspapers surveyed reveals a broad range in terms of raw numbers, from a low of 21 stories across all five topic areas in *USA Today* (note that it publishes only five issues per week, rather than the seven delivered by all other news sources in the study) to a high of 141 stories in the *Houston Chronicle*. Despite this variability, the proportion of stories devoted to the categories of youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect holds relatively stable across all sources, ranging from 81%-98%.

It follows, then, that the obverse holds true; that is, that the proportion of stories devoted collectively to the topics of child care, teen childbearing, or child health insurance ranged from a high of 19% to a low of 2% of all stories presented by any given paper. In sum, regardless of the perspective employed, it is clear that crime and violence dominated the coverage of children in the news in this study, while other important topic areas such as child care, teen childbearing, and child health insurance were comparatively overlooked by the print media.

If that pattern is clear for newspapers, it is even more so for television news. Across a total of 354 newscasts aired on four national networks over the three-month sampling period, only 72 stories were presented on any of the five key topic areas. And of those 72 stories, 96%

[4] Actual figures are 53.2% and 40.4%, which sum with rounding to 94% overall.

of them (N=69) were devoted to some form of crime or violence (the combination of youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect). In contrast, only 3 stories were reported on any of the topics of child care, teen childbearing, and child health insurance across all four networks surveyed over the three-month period. CNN provided the greatest number of stories across all topic areas (N=30), averaging about 1 story every three days, although virtually all of these were devoted to reports categorized as either youth crime/violence or child abuse/neglect. During the entire study, no single network provided more than 1 story on all of the three topics of teen childbearing, child health insurance, or child care, combined.

Basic Characteristics of Coverage. Table 2 provides a summary of the basic characteristics of the stories devoted to the five child topic areas examined by the study. Stories about child care were the greatest in length, averaging nearly 23 column inches of newspaper coverage, or roughly double the amount of space devoted to the average article reporting on youth crime and violence (M=11.3 inches). The one television story devoted to child care (4:17) ran substantially longer than the average time for all child-related coverage, which was 1:50 per story. Newspaper stories addressing the five topic areas were split about evenly between the front section (49%) and the local or metropolitan section (47%) of each newspaper, with only a few articles appearing elsewhere. Roughly 1 out of every 4 stories (24%) received lead coverage, which the study defined as appearing on the front page of a newspaper section, or prior to the first commercial break of a newscast.

The final characteristic reported on Table 2 addresses the extent to which story coverage is either episodic or thematic, a variable that is commonly referred to in news analysis as the story frame. Episodic frames focus on discrete events that involve individuals located at specific places and times (e.g., a report of nightly crime activity), whereas thematic frames place issues in a broader context by focusing on general conditions or outcomes (e.g., a report on poverty trends in the U.S.) (Entman, 1993; Gilliam & Bales, 2001). The data from this study confirm the findings of previous research, which indicate that episodic frames predominate in the news media. More specifically, 89% of all the stories analyzed for this study employed an episodic frame, compared with just 11% that reflected a thematic orientation.

This outcome is driven by the patterns established in the two story categories with the greatest number of articles, namely youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect. In each of these two topic areas, episodic frames were found in at least 90% of the stories. The vast majority of these articles presented time-sensitive reports of crimes that had just occurred or, to a lesser extent, reported progress or outcomes in law enforcement investigations or judicial proceedings related to the crimes. An equally high rate of episodic framing was also observed in the realm of child health insurance, where most of the very few stories presented were focused upon actual or proposed changes in the applicable law in the area. In contrast, much greater emphasis was placed on the thematic framing approach in stories about child care (58% thematic) and teen childbearing (43% thematic).

We will return to this distinction between episodic and thematic story framing shortly when we address the findings from the evaluative measures that assess how well reporters are providing important background and contextual information for the child-related stories that they write.

Finally, Table 3 provides a summary of the use of various elements in the stories addressing the five key topic areas. It reveals that most stories (77%) rely upon expert sources, with relatively little variance across the story types. About half of stories in the area of youth crime/violence (50%) and child abuse/neglect (45%) provide some historical context for their report (defined as information at least 1 year old), whereas other types of stories do this much more often (72-86% of the time). Neither parents nor children are used as sources in the majority of stories in any of the five areas; child care stories are the most likely to use parents as sources (39%) and teen childbearing stories are the most likely to present first-hand accounts from children. Almost none of the coverage of youth crime/violence (1%) or child abuse/neglect (2%) presents information of practical use to parents, while other story areas provide such information somewhat more often (10%-19%). Statistical information is used heavily in the realm of teen childbearing (95% of stories), moderately in the areas of child care (61%) and child health insurance (46%), and very little in stories about child abuse/neglect (9%) or youth crime/violence (6%).

Coverage of Public Policy Concerns. There is a wide range among the five story topic areas in their focus on public policy concerns (see Table 4). Child health insurance stories usually present some factual information about policy issues in their coverage (91% of stories), whereas stories on youth crime/violence (15%) and child abuse/neglect (17%) typically do not. Stories on teen childbearing (24%) and child care (47%) fall in between these two extremes.

From an overall perspective, stories about child health insurance have the greatest likelihood of presenting factual information about current policy, of identifying successes and problems associated with current policy, and of presenting proposals for future policy. Child-care stories rank second on all of these measures, followed by teen childbearing. In contrast, stories about youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect rank consistently low on all of the measures of policy coverage.

Providing Important Contextual Information. The primary goal of this research is to assess the extent to which coverage within these five key topic areas provides the reader with the critical background and contextual knowledge in each domain. Examining all articles identified by the study, we see that there are significant differences across areas in how thoroughly this function is performed by the press. In the realm of teen childbearing, 90% of all stories included at least some information identified by the expert briefing papers as critical background, and this was also true of 75% of the stories on child care (see Table 5, left-hand column). At the opposite end of the spectrum, stories about youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect rarely included any relevant contextual information, with only 3% and 5% of their stories, respectively, addressing any of the points in the expert briefing papers. Child health insurance fell in the middle, with 36% of its stories including important background information identified by the experts, although its total number of stories is so small (N=11) that one must be cautious in interpreting the findings in this area.

As noted previously, the story categories of youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect both reflect a predominantly episodic approach to the framing of their reports. More specifically, about 9 out of every 10 such stories reflect an episodic frame. In contrast, stories about teen childbearing and child care were more evenly balanced, with a nearly equal split between articles employing an episodic vs. a thematic frame. This different approach to the

framing of how stories are reported is clearly associated with the use or omission of critical background information. This pattern can be seen by comparing the right-hand column of Table 5, which isolates the stories that employ only a thematic frame, with the left-hand column of the table, which analyzes all stories regardless of framing approach.

When we examine only those stories with a thematic frame (N=113 of the total of 1,024 stories identified overall), we see that a substantially greater proportion of news coverage includes critical background information in the topic areas of youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect. That is, the percentage of stories presenting relevant background knowledge jumps from 3% to 24% for youth crime/violence, and from 5% to 34% for child abuse/neglect. Of course, these higher levels of information are found only in the small minority of stories (i.e., about 10%) in each of these two topic areas that employ a thematic approach to their subject matter. There is no comparable shift for child care (75% overall vs. 76% thematic), and only a modest improvement for teen childbearing (90% overall vs. 100% thematic). For child health insurance, the figure jumps from 36% to 100%, although the comparison is of limited value because only 1 of the total of 11 articles in this area employed a thematic frame.

In sum, this study makes clear that the news media's coverage of both youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect typically omits background information that the Child Trends research experts deem most valuable for understanding these issues. In the realm of youth crime and violence, even those stories that emphasize analysis over the reporting of episodic events reflect this same pattern. Only about 1 of 4 (24%) thematic stories on youth crime/violence include any of the trend or background information identified by experts, while in the area of child abuse/neglect only 1 in 3 (34%) such stories met that same mark.

News media performance was much stronger on stories involving teen childbearing and child care. Although much less coverage was devoted to these topics, 3 out of 4 (75%) stories about child care presented at least some information identified as critical by experts, while 9 out of 10 (90%) stories about teen childbearing did the same. Stories on the subject of child health insurance proved to be only moderate in their use of relevant background information, with roughly 1 of 3 (36%) including at least some of the key points identified by experts.

Summary and Conclusions

This study of the news media's coverage of children focused on five topic areas widely recognized as among the most significant issues facing the nation's youth. Two of these five topics — youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect — received extensive coverage in the news. Indeed, these two subjects collectively accounted for more than 9 out of every 10 stories that were found across all five of the categories examined over a three-month period. In contrast, however, important topics such as teen childbearing, child health insurance, and child care were consistently overlooked by the print media, and almost invisible on national television newscasts. Even the nation's most prominent metropolitan newspapers on average deliver no more than a story or two per month across all three of these "non-violent" topic areas.

The stories devoted to youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect also appear quite different than the stories on teen childbearing, child health insurance, and child care. Of stories

on youth crime and violence, 9 of 10 are framed in episodic fashion (meaning they emphasize "breaking news" developments). In contrast, stories on the topic of teen childbearing, child health insurance, and child care all tend to be somewhat longer and to rely much less frequently on reporting time-sensitive events without placing those developments in any broader policy context. News coverage that addresses child health insurance focuses more extensively on policy, while stories about child care and teen childbearing tend to include at least moderate treatment of policy perspectives.

Finally, the most significant aspect of this study involves its assessment of how thoroughly news stories across all of these topic areas provide the reader with information deemed the most critically important by experts. In two of the topic areas — child care and teen childbearing — at least 3 out of every 4 stories included some of the important contextual information identified by Child Trends experts. Coverage of a third area, child health insurance, was moderate on this measure, with 36% of stories including some of the important background information.

Yet arguably the most important finding of the study is the dramatically low rate at which stories about youth crime/violence or child abuse/neglect provide any important contextual information in their coverage. Fewer than 1 of every 20 stories in these two categories includes any information to help the reader relate the "breaking news" developments to broader patterns and trends. Even when one isolates stories that employ a thematic approach (i.e., in-depth analysis without emphasis on breaking news), the proportion that provide some relevant background information is still relatively low, at only 24% of the stories about youth crime and violence and 34% of the stories about child abuse and neglect. This contrasts with stories in the other three topic areas that emphasized an analytical approach, where the study found that critical contextual information was presented in 76% of child care stories, and 100% of the coverage of teen childbearing and child health insurance. Clearly, there is a difference in the extent to which the news media are providing important background and contextual information to their readers in the areas of youth crime/violence and child abuse/neglect, as compared to the other three story topics that were examined in this study.

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Table 1

Frequency of Child-Related Stories by Topic Area and News Source

	News Source	Teen Child-bearing		Child Care		Child Health Insurance		Child Abuse/ Neglect		Youth Crime/ Violence		Total N of Stories
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Newspaper	Atlanta Constitution	2	2%	1	1%	2	2%	45	53%	35	41%	85
	Chicago Tribune	0	0%	4	4%	0	0%	45	39%	66	57%	115
	Denver Post	2	2%	7	6%	2	2%	42	37%	60	53%	113
	Houston Chronicle	3	2%	2	1%	4	3%	58	41%	74	53%	141
	Los Angeles Times	1	1%	2	2%	0	0%	45	38%	72	60%	120
	Miami Herald	2	3%	1	1%	0	0%	31	39%	46	58%	80
	Minneapolis Star Tribune	3	4%	2	3%	0	0%	25	35%	42	58%	72
	New York Times	1	2%	5	11%	0	0%	17	39%	21	48%	44
	Okla. City Oklahoman	1	2%	2	3%	0	0%	32	47%	33	49%	68
	Portland Oregonian	1	1%	4	5%	1	1%	33	40%	44	53%	83
	Washington Post	2	2%	2	2%	2	2%	35	43%	41	50%	82
	USA Today	1	5%	3	14%	0	0%	6	29%	11	52%	21
	Newspaper Total	19	2%	35	3%	11	1%	414	40%	545	53%	1024
Television	ABC	1	8%	0	0%	0	0%	4	31%	8	62%	13
	CBS	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	5	29%	11	65%	17
	NBC	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7	58%	5	42%	12
	CNN	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	17	57%	12	40%	30
	Television Total	2	3%	1	1%	0	0%	33	46%	36	50%	72

Note: Percentages add across to 100% for each news source.

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Table 2

Basic Characteristics of Child-Related Stories by Topic Area

Story Type	Teen Child-bearing	Child Care	Child Health Insurance	Child Abuse/ Neglect	Youth Crime/ Violence	Total
	N =21	N =36	N =11	N =447	N =581	N =1096
Story Length						
Newspaper	15.1	22.8	15.7	13.9	11.3	12.8
Television	1:56	4:17	0	1:52	1:43	1:50
Section of Newspaper						
Front	52%	26%	45%	50%	49%	49%
Local/Metro	37%	37%	55%	46%	48%	47%
Business	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Arts/lifestyle	10%	17%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Special Edition	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	14%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Story Position						
Lead Story	19%	42%	27%	26%	21%	24%
Buried	81%	58%	73%	74%	79%	76%
Story Type						
Episodic	57%	42%	91%	90%	92%	89%
Thematic	43%	58%	9%	10%	7%	11%
N of Stories						
N of Newspaper Stories	19	35	11	414	545	102
N of Television Stories	2	1	0	33	36	72
Total N of Stories	21	36	11	447	581	1096

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Table 3

Elements Included in Child-Related Stories by Topic Area

Story Type	Teen Childbearing	Child Care	Child Health Insurance	Child Abuse/ Neglect	Youth Crime/ Violence	Total
	N =21	N =36	N =11	N =447	N =581	N =1096
Uses expert sources	71%	89%	100%	76%	76%	77%
Presents some historical context for story	86%	72%	82%	50%	45%	49%
Uses parents as source of information	14%	39%	27%	29%	15%	21%
Presents first-hand accounts from children	38%	11%	0%	13%	24%	19%
Presents information of practical use for parents	10%	19%	18%	2%	1%	3%
Presents statistical information	95%	61%	46%	9%	6%	11%

Table 4

Treatment of Public Policy in Child-Related Stories by Topic Area

Type of Policy	Teen Child-bearing	Child Care	Child Health Insurance	Child Abuse /Neglect	Youth Crime/ Violence	Total
	N =21	N =36	N =11	N =447	N =581	N =1096
Presents factual information about the current state of policy	24%	47%	91%	16%	14%	17%
Identifies problems with the current policy*	14%	33%	55%	11%	7%	10%
Presents suggestions or proposals for future policy*	19%	19%	27%	4%	2%	4%
Identifies successes accomplished by the current policy	19%	31%	55%	8%	5%	8%

Note: Items marked with an asterisk reflect data with slightly low reliability coefficients, as described in the "Methodology" section of this report, and should be viewed with some caution.

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Table 5

Use of Important Contextual Information in Child-Related Stories by Topic Area

Type of Coverage	% of all stories with relevant information	% of thematic stories with relevant information
Teen Childbearing		
US has high rate despite recent declines	81%	89%
Shifts in rate over past years	71%	78%
Hispanics have highest rate	29%	22%
Identification of key risk factors	9%	11%
Proportion of non-married births by teens	5%	11%
% of stories with relevant information on at least one item	**90%**	**100%**
Child Care		
Child care is increasingly common	14%	14%
Majority of young children experience	11%	5%
Government subsidies have increased	14%	10%
Quality has modest impact on child development	44%	52%
Research on effects is controversial	42%	52%
% of stories with relevant information on at least one item	**75%**	**76%**
Child Health Insurance		
Proportion without coverage is highly stable	9%	100%
Working poor families are least covered	36%	100%
Proportions with private coverage has fluctuated	0	0
Publicly-provided coverage has fluctuated	0	0
Hispanics are least likely to be covered	0	0
% of stories with relevant information on at least one item	**36%**	**100%**

Table 5 (Cont'd.)

Use of Important Contextual Information in Child-Related Stories by Topic Area

Type of Coverage	% of all stories with relevant information	% of thematic stories with relevant information
Child Abuse/Neglect		
Neglect is most common form	1%	9%
Number of victims is declining	0	5%
Relative frequency by type	0	5%
Youngest are most valuable	3%	5%
Parent is most common perpetrator	0	21%
% of stories with relevant information on at least one item	**5%**	**34%**
Youth Crime/Violence		
Levels remain high despite recent declines	1%	9%
Shifts in rate over past years	1%	11%
Firearms increasingly used	0	2%
Overall shifts driven by black male change	0	2%
Teens more likely crime victims than adults	0	6%
% of stories with relevant information on at least one item	**3%**	**24%**

Child TRENDS

Appendix 1

Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States

Prepared by Child Trends
for the Casey Journalism Center

After increasing in the early 1990s, the estimated number of children who were victims of abuse and neglect declined from 1994 through 1999. Neglect consistently accounts for about half or more of the cases of child maltreatment.

- From 1990 through 1994, the estimated number of victims of child abuse and neglect increased from approximately 861,000 to just over 1 million. The trend then reversed so that by 1999, an estimated 826,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect.

- In 1999, 58 percent of child maltreatment victims experienced neglect, 21 percent were physically abused, and 11 percent were sexually abused. (Please note that some children suffered more than one form of maltreatment.)

- Rates for child maltreatment are highest for the youngest children (ages 0-3) and lowest for older children (ages 16-17).

- In the vast majority of child maltreatment cases, a parent or parents (including step-parents) are the perpetrators.

    - Based on data from 19 states, a parent or parents were the perpetrators in 87 percent of child maltreatment cases in 1999. Other care providers and relatives together were perpetrators in less than 6 percent of child maltreatment cases.

    - In almost half of cases of child maltreatment (45 percent), a child was victimized by a female parent acting alone. In 18 percent of cases, both parents were the perpetrators, and in 16 percent of cases, the perpetrator was a male parent acting alone.

Child TRENDS

Appendix 2

Child Care in the United States

Prepared by Child Trends
for the Casey Journalism Center

Child care has become an increasingly common experience among families with young children.

- More than half (54 percent) of children ages birth through 3rd grade were in some kind of nonparental care in 1999, up slightly from 1995. This includes:
  - 49 percent of children ages birth to 2; 77 percent of children ages 3-6 not yet in kindergarten, some portion of whom are in a preschool or other early childhood education program; 49 percent of kindergartners; and 43 percent of children in grades 1 through 3.

- Under welfare reform, federal and state funding has increased to provide child care subsidies to low-income families, especially those moving from welfare to work.
  - Yet many eligible families still do not receive subsidies, and the subsidy levels are often too low to purchase quality care.
  - Working families with modest incomes may have the hardest time paying for child care since they often do not qualify for subsidies, nor do they pay enough taxes to benefit from the Child and Dependent Care tax credit.

- Research finds that the *quality* of child care has at least a modest influence child outcomes, but that the family and the home environments are much stronger influences on child outcomes than is child care.
  - Research also suggests that much of the child care available in the U.S. is *not* high-quality.

- Debates continue in the research community over the effects of child care on children, even as use of child care is increasingly common among families of young children.

Child TRENDS

Appendix 3

Child Health Insurance in the United States

Prepared by Child Trends
for the Casey Journalism Center

The percentage of children with health insurance coverage has remained largely unchanged (between 85 and 87 percent) for more than a decade.

- Children in working poor families* are less likely to have health insurance than either children in other poor families or children in families that are not poor.
    - However, the gap in health insurance coverage between children in working poor families and children in other poor families narrowed between 1996 and 1998 after implementation of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which primarily targets children with family incomes between 100 and 200 percent of poverty.
- The percentage of children with private health insurance has declined in the last decade, from 74 percent of all children in 1988 to 68 percent in 1998.
- The percentage of children with publicly-provided health insurance fluctuated during this same period, increasing from 19 percent in 1988 to 27 percent in 1993, before declining to 23 percent by 1998.
    - Black and Hispanic children are much more likely than white children to receive publicly-provided health insurance. In 1998, 42 percent of black children, 31 percent of Hispanic children, and 19 percent of white children had publicly-provided health insurance.
- In general, Hispanic children are less likely to have health insurance coverage than either black or white children. In 1998, 70 percent of Hispanic children had health insurance, compared to 80 percent of black children and 86 percent of white children.

* Working poor families are defined here as families with incomes below the federal poverty line in which two parents together work at least 35 hours a week, or a single parent works at least 20 hours a week.

Appendix 4

Teen Childbearing in the United States

Prepared by Child Trends
for the Casey Journalism Center

The U.S. teen birth rate has declined every year from 1991 to 1999, yet the U.S. still has a much higher teen birth rate than other industrialized nations.

- The teen birth rate in the U.S. declined substantially from 1960 through 1986. The trend then reversed, as the teen birth rate increased between 1986 and 1991, fueling public concern over teen pregnancy. After 1991, the teen birth rate began to decrease again and has continued to decline through 1999, the latest year for which data are available.

- *Hispanics* have had the highest teen birth rate in the U.S. since 1995, followed by blacks and then whites. While the black and white rates declined beginning in 1992, the Hispanic teen birth rate did not begin to decline until 1995.

    - Blacks have experienced the most substantial drop in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 1999.
    - Whites account for 45 percent of all teen births (ages 15-19) in the U.S. Blacks account for 25 percent, and Hispanics for 26 percent.

- Research strongly indicates that four factors increase the likelihood that a teen will bear a child: poverty, family dysfunction, early behavior problems, and early school failure.

- Teenagers account for a diminishing share of births outside of marriage in the U.S. In 1999, teens accounted for 29 percent of nonmarital births, compared to half of nonmarital births in 1970. Women in their 20's accounted for 55 percent of nonmarital births in 1999.

Child TRENDS

Appendix 5

Youth Crime and Violence in the United States

Prepared by Child Trends
for the Casey Journalism Center

Violent crime by youth and on youth have both declined substantially since the mid-1990s, although levels remain very high.

- Rates of serious violent crime by youth (including aggravated assault, rape, robbery, and homicide) increased substantially from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s. The rate then began to drop in 1994 and has declined steadily since then.

- Firearms are involved in 85 percent of youth homicides – up from 66 percent in 1980.

- Both the increase and the subsequent decrease in the youth homicide rate were largely driven by changes in the homicide rate for black male youth. While the black youth homicide rate (ages 15 to 19) fell by almost half between 1993 and 1998, it remains much higher than the white youth homicide rate.

- Youth ages 12 to 17 are nearly three times as likely as adults to be *victims* of serious violent crimes.

Appendix 6

Sample Stories for Each Topic with Commentary by Dale Kunkel

Child Abuse/Neglect
Shaken Baby Syndrome
By Pat Dawson, NBC News
Saturday, June 2, 2002

This story profiles a child abuse prevention project at Children's Hospital of Buffalo, N.Y. Parents of newborns are shown a videotape documenting the risks of "shaken baby syndrome," in which adults, upset by persistent infant crying, may unintentionally commit a deadly form of abuse by shaking a baby to quiet it. The report provides valuable information about child abuse patterns and underscores the key points that younger children are at greatest risk of abuse, and that such abuse is most likely to come from parents.

Child Care
Shedding Light on the Day-Care Doom and Gloom
By Meghan Mutchler Deerin, *Chicago Tribune*
Sunday, July 15, 2002
Health & Family, page 1

This report addresses how children are affected by spending long hours in child-care facilities. The recent release of a government-sponsored study on the topic triggered a great deal of controversy among both researchers and parents, and this article provides context for making sense of the issues raised. In particular, the story conveyed excellent information about the relationship between the quality of child care and child development outcomes.

Child Health Insurance
Health Coverage for Kids Low Cost but Little Used
By Ceci Connolly, *The Washington Post*
Friday, June 1, 2002
Page A3

This 30-inch story examined a problem reportedly shared by some seven million U.S. children: they are eligible for free or subsidized health care coverage under a 1997 law adopted by Congress known as the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), but are not receiving it. The story focuses on the resources available to children from low-income families, and examines the reasons why more youngsters who qualify are not benefiting from CHIP. The report provides historical context about the issue and addresses the problems of low-income workers, an often-overlooked segment of the population.

Appendix 6 (Cont'd.)

Sample Stories for Each Topic

Teen Childbearing
Teen Activists Diverge on Issues of Sex
By Duke Helfand, *Los Angeles Times*
Wednesday, June 6, 2002
Page B2

This report contrasts two distinct approaches to try to reduce teen pregnancy. One involves a message of abstinence, and the other seeks to provide information about contraceptives to those who are sexually active. The story focuses on teens who participate in a theater troupe that emphasizes abstinence. The reporter includes critical information about national trends in the teen birthrate, which has declined in recent years yet remains higher than most other comparable nations.

Youth Crime/Violence
Sex Attacks on Students at 10 a Week and Rising
By Edward Wyatt, *The New York Times*
Sunday, June 3, 2002
Section 1, page 27

This story examines a pattern of increasing sexual crime reported by the city's school system, providing a broader perspective on many incidents that had been reported earlier. The article contrasts the increase in sexual incidents with the overall decline in other types of youth crime. It conveys clearly the key point identified by subject experts that violent crime by and against youth has declined substantially in recent years. Such information provides particularly important context in a story that runs counter to that trend.

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